

Research Studies

Children with asthma have been the subject of several research projects. In one study, children with asthma were found to have lower anxiety, improved attitude towards the asthma condition, and increased peak air flow after regular massage by their parents. Over a one-month period, these children had fewer asthma attacks. The study suggested that daily massage may lead to improved airway tone, decreased airway irritability, and better control of asthma in children.¹

In another study, an increase in thoracic gas volume, peak flow and forced vital capacity was found in 4 out of 5 COPD patients receiving a combination of massage and myofascial trigger point therapy, i.e., neuromuscular massage. The neuromuscular techniques were specifically directed to improve the function of chronically hypertonic muscles involved in breathing.²

Anxiety is a huge factor for those who suffer from breathing problems. The effects of MT on anxiety are even better understood; the effects of massage on anxiety and depression are the most well-established effects in the research literature. Single sessions of MT significantly reduce state anxiety, the momentary emotional experiences of apprehension, tension, and worry in both adults and in children, and multiple sessions of MT, performed over a period of days or weeks, significantly reduce trait anxiety, the normally stable individual tendency to experience anxiety states, to an impressive degree in adults.

Anxiety and depression exacerbate many other specific health conditions, such as the anxiety resulting from chronic breathing problems.³ Anxiety itself can make one feel short of breath - and feeling short of breath can make one feel more anxiety...two conditions that feed off of each other - and that can be helped greatly by massage. Your massage therapist may use different massage therapy approaches than those used in the studies to achieve positive results. There is no one best approach. The most important thing is that whatever techniques are used are effective at reducing stress, relaxing and freeing the musculature involved in breathing, and generally improving pulmonary function.

References:

1. Field, Tiffany. Touch Therapy. (New York: Churchill Livingstone, 2000)
2. Beeken, J., et. al. Effectiveness of Neuromuscular Release Massage Therapy on Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease. Clin. Nurs. Research. 7(3): 309-325; Augt 1998.
3. Moyer, Christopher A. Affective Massage Therapy. Int J Ther Massage Bodywork. 2008; 1(2): 3-5.

This brochure is intended for information only. Contact your physician for diagnosis of medical conditions, and for advice on whether massage might be beneficial for you.

Massage for Respiratory Conditions written by
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Respiratory Conditions

Breathe a little easier.



**THERAPEUTIC
MASSAGE**

For a Healthier Life

Massage for Respiratory Conditions

Therapeutic massage can help those with chronic respiratory problems breathe a little easier. People with conditions such as chronic bronchitis, emphysema, and asthma may benefit from the healing effects of massage. For example, massage can help reduce anxiety associated with breathing problems, help release restrictions in respiratory structures, address over-worked muscles and poor posture caused by strained breathing efforts, and loosen mucus for more productive coughs.

Respiratory Diseases

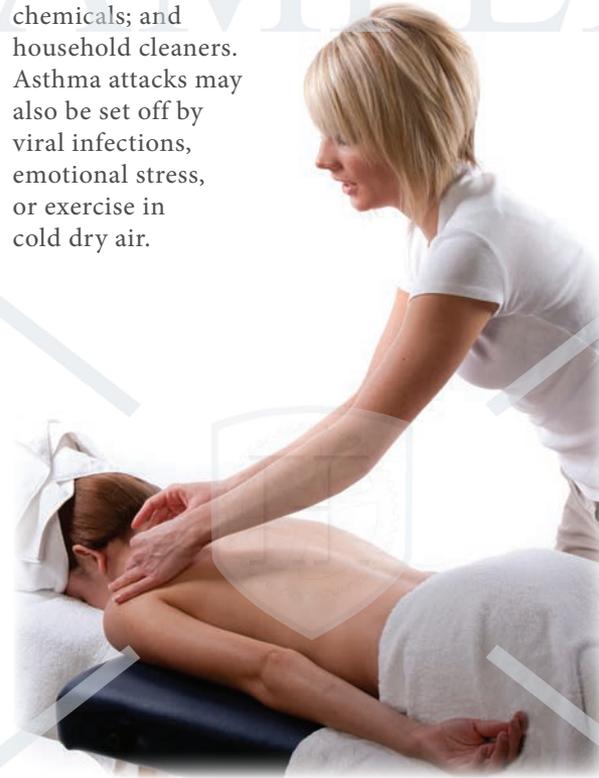
Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Diseases (COPD) such as chronic bronchitis and emphysema are characterized by breathing difficulties brought on by irritated and damaged respiratory tissues. Possible causes of COPD include cigarette smoking, exposure to second-hand smoke and other environmental pollutants, and in some cases, genetic factors.

Emphysema is a progressive, degenerative condition in which there is over-inflation of the tiny air sacs of the lungs called alveoli. The lungs become less elastic so the person with emphysema has to work harder to exhale. Breathing tends to be rapid and shallow.

Muscles of the neck and chest that normally play a more minor role are brought into play to help inhale and exhale. This causes muscle tension and fatigue. The person with emphysema may lean over to help in exhalation, a posture that limits inhalation.

Asthma is a respiratory condition in which the bronchial airways react to certain stimulation by constricting, swelling, and creating excess mucus. The tiny airway hairs called cilia are damaged and unable to do a good job of moving mucus as they should. The result is labored breathing, wheezing, chest constriction, and coughing.

Environmental stimuli that may set off asthma symptoms include allergens such as feathers, dust mites, animal dander, mold; drugs such as aspirin, coloring agents, sulfates; air pollutants such as ozone, pollen, smoke; occupational materials such as metal salts, wood and vegetable dust, industrial chemicals; and household cleaners. Asthma attacks may also be set off by viral infections, emotional stress, or exercise in cold dry air.



Therapeutic Massage

Therapeutic massage can complement medical treatment of respiratory conditions in a number of ways. Although massage is not a cure for respiratory conditions, it can alleviate symptoms in some cases, and enhance the quality of life for those suffering with breathing difficulties.

Breaks the Cycle of Anxiety. People with breathing difficulties can get caught in a vicious cycle that keeps repeating until broken. The cycle involves rapid shallow breathing, stress response, and anxiety. This is a physiological phenomenon with an emotional component. The cycle can be entered from

any point through stress overload, a shallow breathing pattern, or anxiety related to the disease or from everyday life. Something calming is needed to break the cycle. Massage is known to elicit the relaxation response, alleviating the effects of stress, and have positive benefits for those suffering from anxiety. This restores a deeper diaphragmatic breathing pattern, so that the person gets the most from the lung function they still have. And when anxiety is a trigger for asthma attacks, reduction in anxiety can mean fewer attacks.

Relieves Muscle Tension - Labored breathing causes the muscles around the rib cage and in the shoulders and neck to become tense and shortened. This condition further restricts respiration and the amount of air that can be inhaled and exhaled. Massage can release tension in the various muscles, helping you to breathe easier.

Reduces Fatigue - Strained breathing efforts and poor posture require extra energy and can cause fatigue. The increased effort needed to inhale and exhale overworks certain muscles leaving them tense and tired. Massage helps relax tense muscles and improve breathing patterns, thereby conserving energy and reducing fatigue overall.

More Productive Coughs - More Productive Coughs. Percussion massage techniques such as clapping, hacking, and rapping on the chest and back are standard in respiratory therapy. Passive movement of the rib cage, as well as percussion can help loosen mucus for more productive and cleansing coughs.

Position Options - Lying flat on a massage table may present problems for someone having difficulty breathing. Other position options for massage include side-lying, semi-reclining, sitting upright in massage chair, or even sitting in a recliner or wheelchair. Discuss which position is most comfortable for you with your massage therapist.